



Department of Commerce
Innovation is in our nature.

Guidelines

FOR

Housing and Essential Needs Grant

Funded through the
Housing Assistance Unit
Community Services and Housing Division

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1. Overview

The Housing and Essential Needs Grant is one of three new programs created by [Engrossed Senate House Bill 2082](#) that terminated the [Disability Lifeline Program](#), which ended October 2011.

Grant Activities: Housing and Essential Needs Grant funds are limited to providing rental assistance, utility assistance and essential needs for Medical Care Services recipients whose eligibility is determined by the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS).

Fund Sources: General Fund State appropriation to the Department of Commerce for 2011-13 biennium.

2. Purpose

The purpose of the *Guidelines* is to:

1. Provide detail on client eligibility;
2. Outline allowable activities for Lead Grantees and Sub Grantees; and
3. Provide standards for documenting services and ensuring compliance.

This document is incorporated into Commerce's Housing and Essential Needs Grant agreement and may be modified at any time during the grant period.

3. Who can receive support from the *Housing and Essential Needs* grant funds?

Housing and Essential Needs Grant funds can **only** be used to support Medical Care Services recipients whose eligibility is determined by DSHS.

Some important points:

- Grantees must serve homeless or at risk of becoming homeless clients (determined through an assessment) for the length of time they are eligible, need assistance, and grant funds are available.
- There is limited grant funding and not every client who is eligible and requests help with their rent and/or utility bills will be able to receive assistance.
- Housing support and essential needs assistance is not an entitlement.
- Lead/Sub Grantees will verify client eligibility through the DSHS Benefits Verification System.

Homeless

Medical Care Service recipients who are homeless per the following definition may be eligible for rent and utility assistance.

A household who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, meaning:

- Sleeping in a place not designed for, or not ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation, including a car, a park, an abandoned building, a bus or train station, an airport, or a campground.
- Living in a shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements, including congregate shelters, transitional housing, hotels/motels paid for by charitable organizations, or federal/state/local government programs.
- Exiting an institution such as a jail or hospital where they resided for 90 days or less AND was residing in an emergency shelter or place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering the institution.

Households fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking or other dangerous or life threatening conditions related to violence, who:

- have no identified subsequent residence; AND
- lack the resources and support networks needed to obtain other permanent housing.

Substantial Risk

Eligible Medical Care Service recipients who are at substantial risk of homelessness per the following two criteria are eligible for rent and utility assistance.

1. Documentation

Does the applicant client have documentation that they will lose their housing within 30 days if they do not receive assistance?

- Rental Agreement
- Lease
- Certification from friend/family of a payment obligation
- Pay/Vacate Notice
- Eviction Notice
- Certification from friend/family of potential eviction
- Utility bill
- Utility Late Payment
- Utility Shut off Notice

If the client has documentation from the list above, then the Lead /Sub Grantees must conduct the following Assessment.

2. Assessment

It must be determined through an interview/assessment that the client does not have support networks to help with their housing and there are no other subsequent housing options. In other words, “*but for*” assistance, the client would become homeless. This assessment can be conducted through a limited interview where the client may be asked the following questions and responses documented in limited assessment notes.

- What are your support networks and are they able to assist? Typical support networks include relatives, friends, church, and other social service agencies.
- Do you have any friends or family in the area? Can you stay with any of them, even temporarily? If no, please explain why.
- What other housing options do you have? Where will your household go if you are evicted or are otherwise without housing?

Included in the above Assessment, Lead /Sub Grantees **may** also select an additional Risk Factor from the list below and indicate in the client assessment notes.

Additional Risk Factors

- Discharge within two weeks from an institution in which the person has been a resident for more than 180 days (including prisons, mental health institutions, and hospitals).
- High overcrowding (the number of person exceeds health and/or safety standards for the housing size unit).
- Residency in housing that has been condemned by housing officials and is no longer meant for human habitation.
- Current or past involvement with child welfare, including foster care.
- Sudden and significant increase in utility costs or medical debt.
- Physical disabilities and other chronic health issues, including HIV/AIDS.
- Past institutional care (prison, treatment facility, hospital).
- Mental health and history of substance abuse issues.
- Credit problems that preclude obtaining of housing.
- Pending foreclosure of rental housing.
- Homeless in last 12 months.

4. Eligible Activities and Expenses Overview

Housing and Essential Needs assistance is not intended to address all of the financial needs of eligible clients.

Rent and Utility Assistance / Operations

- Lease/rent/security and utility payments, rental arrears
- Housing Stability

Landlord Stability Fund

- Up to 3 months of rent/utilities assistance after MCS eligibility terminated

Essential Needs

- Personal hygiene products, cleaning supplies, transportation

Administrative Costs

- Limited to 7 percent
- Lead must share with sub grantees

Rent and Utility Assistance

Allowable Rent and Utility Assistance

- ✓ Monthly rent, lease, rent/lease and utilities, and any combination of first and last month's rent and security deposits (and fees required to maintain residency).
 - Utilities are limited to electricity, natural gas, propane (or other alternative heating source) sewer, water and garbage services.
- ✓ Fees for housing application if necessary/required for housing.
- ✓ Lot rent for RV or manufactured home.
- ✓ Costs of parking spaces when connected to a unit.
- ✓ Costs associated with household credit checks, reasonable storage costs and landlord incentives (provided there are written policies and/or procedures explaining what constitutes landlord incentives, how they are determined, and who has approval and review responsibilities).

- ✓ Grantees may use HEN funds to pay for rent per a rental agreement with hotel/motels for temporarily housing people who are homeless. The hotel/motel room should be considered a short term measure while a more permanent housing solution is identified. The cost should be close to the budgeted amount grantees determined for homeless rents. Security deposits for hotel/motels are allowed.
- ✓ Rental Arrears. Rental assistance may also be used to pay for up to six months of rental arrears. Rental arrears may be paid if the payment enables the household to remain in the housing unit for which the arrears are being paid or move to another unit.
- ✓ In cases where an eviction cannot be prevented, rental arrears can still be paid if it satisfies the grievance with the evicting landlord and thereby allows the household to obtain different housing.
- ✓ Animal deposit.*

* RCW 162-38-100 It is an unfair practice for a landlord to charge a tenant with a disability using a dog guide or service animal a pet deposit in addition to any standard cleaning or damage deposit charged to all tenants.

Important Note for Utility Assistance for Homeowners:

Assistance with a mortgage payment is not allowable. However, if an eligible HEN client is a homeowner and needs assistance with a utility payment and would lose their housing without assistance (per the Risk Intake/Assessment), you may assist them with their utility costs.

Operations

Operations are costs specifically attributed to outreach workers, and/or housing locators (and their supervisors); and other related personnel and costs specifically related to the grant such as:

- ✓ Salaries/benefits for determining eligibility, data collection and entry.
- ✓ Salaries/benefits for housing search and placement, stability (described below).
- ✓ Office space, utilities, supplies, telephone, internet and mileage.
- ✓ A limited portion of staff salaries/benefits costs to issue Rent Assistance and Essential Needs Assistance (described below).
- ✓ Salaries/benefits to monitor sub grantees (or can charge in Administrative).
- ✓ Costs of criminal background checks of clients if necessary/required for housing.
- ✓ Costs of urinalyses for drug testing of clients if necessary/required for housing.
- ✓ Costs of household credit checks if necessary/required for housing.

Outreach

Services or assistance designed to publicize the availability of programs to make eligible persons who are homeless or almost homeless aware of these and other available services and programs. Not all households assessed will be eligible for assistance. Time spent assessing a household is an eligible expense under this activity.

Housing Search and Placement

Services or activities designed to assist individuals or households in locating, obtaining, and retaining suitable housing. Services or activities may include: tenant counseling, assisting individuals and households to understand leases, securing utilities, making moving arrangements, representative payee services concerning rent and utilities, and mediation and outreach to property owners related to locating or retaining housing.

Housing Stability

Services or activities for the arrangement, coordination, monitoring, and delivery of services related to meeting the housing needs of households and helping them obtain housing stability. Services and activities may include: counseling; developing, securing, and coordinating services; monitoring and evaluating household progress; assuring that households' rights are protected; and developing an individualized housing and service plan, including a path to permanent housing stability subsequent to assistance.

Staff Costs to Issue Rent Assistance

This cost is not for a bookkeeper whose duties extend beyond grant related activities. This cost is only associated with the appropriate portion of salary and benefits of the bookkeeper who issues payments on behalf of an eligible client.

Landlord Stability Funds

Landlord Stability Funds can be used for up to three additional months of rent/utility assistance for clients previously assisted by a HEN grantee who is no longer MCS eligible.

Essential Needs

Allowable Essential Needs Assistance

1. Personal health and hygiene items (such as toothpaste, shampoo, toilet paper).
2. Household cleaning supplies (such as laundry and dish soap).

3. Bus passes, limited transportation.
4. Grantees may use HEN funds to purchase and distribute laundry tokens (unused tokens cannot be exchanged for cash at the laundromat).
5. Grantees may use HEN funds to provide automobile fuel vouchers. Grantees need to ensure that the vouchers cannot be exchanged for cash and they should be in limited/reasonable quantities.

Important Restriction:

Lead/Sub Grantees cannot provide retailer or merchant gift cards, vouchers or certificates for a client to purchase personal health, hygiene and household cleaning supplies.

Administrative

Up to 7 percent of total reimbursed costs over the course of the grant period may be used for administration and must be shared between the Lead Grantee and any Sub Grantees. This limit must be reconciled before the end of the grant period.

Allowable administrative costs are those costs that benefit the organization as a whole. They may include the following: executive director/accounting/human resources/IT salaries, benefits, office supplies and equipment; general organization insurance; organization wide audits; board expenses; organization-wide membership fees and dues. This list is not all-inclusive.

General agency facilities costs can be charged to Administration or Operations depending on their purpose. Facilities costs include the following: rent, building use allowances, and operations and maintenance costs such as janitorial and utilities. This list is not all-inclusive.

Facilities costs directly attributable to the program may be charged to Program Operations. Administrative and facilities expenses cannot be billed by equal monthly distributions of the budget amount. These costs must be charged to grant cost centers by one of the three following methods: etc.

1. They can be billed directly such as IT services that are billed by the hour.
2. They can be allocated by means of a cost allocation plan.
3. They can be charged by use of an indirect cost rate which has been appropriately negotiated and approved.

5. Documentation Requirements

There are minimal documentation requirements for assisting eligible clients.

Eligibility Documentation

Lead/Sub Grantees must include a print out from the DSHS's Benefits Verification System (BVS) documenting the client's eligibility for rent and/or utility and/or essential needs assistance. The BVS document is good for a 45 day period.

A BVS Consent Form must be kept in the client file.

Housing Status Documentation

Lead/Sub Grantees must include of the following document/s in the client file to indicate housing status.

Homeless Status - Lead/Sub Grantees only need to record the client's housing status in the HMIS.

Substantial Risk Status - Lead/Sub Grantees must include the following appropriate document/s in the client file:

1. Rental Agreement
2. Lease
3. Certification from friend/family of a payment obligation
4. Pay/Vacate Notice
5. Eviction Notice
6. Certification from friend/family of potential eviction
7. Utility bill
8. Utility Late Payment
9. Utility Shut off Notice

Essential Needs Documentation

If Essential Needs support is being provided in the context of rent or utility support and by the same entity, the client's BVS form is sufficient.

If Essential Needs support is not being provided in the context of rent or utility support, the Essential Needs provider must verify eligibility in BVS.

Client Records in HMIS

Commerce requires each grantee (and sub grantees) to enter HEN client data into a Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).

Each grantee must follow all state and federal laws governing HMIS, including collecting informed written consent from program participants, not denying service based solely on program participant refusal to provide data to an HMIS, protecting program participant confidentiality, not collecting personally identifying information from program participants that are victims of domestic violence, and other requirements defined in [RCW 43.185C.030](#), [43.185C.180](#), and [VAWA Reauthorization Section 605](#).

Program participant data collected by HMIS systems will be transmitted to Commerce and then sent to DSHS for additional analysis. Written program participant consent forms should reflect this data transmittal. Program participant data will be used for research purposes only and only viewed by research staff and HMIS system administrators. Program participant data will not be disclosed to staff involved in determining program eligibility, or used in any way to determine program eligibility.

Retention of Paper Copies of Personally Identifying Data from a Homeless Management Information System

Agencies must develop and adopt policies governing the retention of paper records containing personally identifying information derived from a Homeless Management Information system. The policy must define how long paper records are retained after they are no longer being actively utilized, and the process that will be used to destroy the records to prevent the release of personally identifying information. The policy must require the destruction of the paper records derived from an HMIS no longer than seven years after the last day the person was served by the organization.

6. Applicant Denial and Grievance, Termination of Participation

There is limited grant funding and not every client who is eligible and requests help with their rent and/or utility bills will be able to receive assistance.

Lead/Sub Grantees must have written and available policies and/or procedures for the following:

Applicant Denial and Grievance

Lead/Sub Grantees must have in place a procedure that governs applicant denial and grievance process. These procedures should describe the requirements in which a client may not qualify or be denied, notification of denial and should include information about a client's right to review a Lead/Sub Grantee's decision. Causes of denial of assistance include, but are not limited to, the client's ineligibility or failure to provide verifiable evidence of eligibility, etc.

The termination, denial, and grievance procedures should be readily available to clients either in written information or by posting the policy in a public place. It is important to effectively communicate these procedures to clients and ensure that the procedures are fully understood.

Termination of Participation and Grievance

Causes for termination may include, but are not limited to, failure to abide by any agreed upon requirements. In terminating assistance to a client, the Lead/Sub Grantees must provide a formal process that recognizes the rights of clients receiving assistance. This process, at a minimum, must consist of:

- ✓ Written notice to the client containing a clear statement of the reasons for termination;
- ✓ A review of the decision, in which the client is given the opportunity to present written or oral objections before a person other than the person (or a subordinate of that person) who made or approved the termination decision. This may include the client's right to question or confront staff involved; and
- ✓ Prompt written notice of the final decision.

7. Confidentiality of Client Records

Lead/Sub Grantees must have policies and/or procedures ensuring client records are maintained in a confidential manner as per [RCW 43.185C.030](#) and [RCW 43.185C.180](#) and keep written records or files pertaining to households under lock and key with designated personnel granted access to those files.

8. Changes to Guidelines

Commerce may issue revised or new Guidelines at any time. All Lead Grantees will be sent revised copies as they are published. It is the Lead Grantee's responsibility to pass on the revisions to Sub Grantees in a timely manner.